

MEMOIRS

OF

EDWARD MARCUS DESPARD.

BY

JAMES BANNANTINE,

HIS SECRETARY, WHEN KING'S SUPERINTENDENT AT
HONDURAS, &c.

Iustum et tenacem propositi virum,
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni,
Mente quatit solida.

HORACE.

LONDON:

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SQUARE.

1799.

MEMOIRS

EDWARD MARCUS DESPARD

JAMES BANNAUTINE

OF THE SECRETARY, WHEN FIRST APPOINTED AT

HONOLULU, 1820

BY JAMES BANNAUTINE, ESQ.
OF THE SECRETARY, WHEN FIRST APPOINTED AT
HONOLULU, 1820

ALBANY

PRINTED FOR A. S. BOWEN, 1820



ADVERTISEMENT.

FROM the discussions that have lately taken place, respecting the imprisonment of Colonel Despard, in the prison of Cold Bath Fields, and his treatment there, the Public have been considerably interested respecting that officer. Some detail of his services may be therefore acceptable ; and the writer of this having had the fullest opportunities of being informed upon this subject, thinks it would be unjust to withhold the following concise narrative from the world. —In justice to Colonel Despard he adds, that this publication is made altogether without that gentleman's knowledge.

J. B.

*Temple Street, St. George's Fields,
January 17, 1799.*

ADVERTISEMENT

Notice

FROM the difficulties that have lately
arisen, respecting the impeachment
of Colonel Bland, in the office of Gold
Bull, &c. and the statement there, the
Public have been considerably interested in
speculating thereon. Some details of his ser-
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—In justice to Colonel Bland we add,
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without that gentleman's knowledge.

J. B.

Printed by J. B. at the ...

London 1799

MEMOIRS

OF

COLONEL DESPARD.

THIS gentleman is descended of a very ancient and respectable family in the Queen's County, Ireland. He is the youngest of six brothers, all of whom have served in the army or navy, except the eldest, who holds the family estate, and who lately raised a corps for the defence of his country.

EDWARD MARCUS DESPARD was born in 1750 or 1751. In 1766 he entered into the army as an ensign in the 50th. He afterwards served as a lieutenant in that regiment, and successively as lieutenant, quarter-

quarter-master, captain-lieutenant, and captain in the 79th; and received many distinguished marks of approbation of his conduct from his commanders, and other officers high in rank, who had an opportunity of judging of his *mérit*, particularly the late General Calcraft of the 50th (who returned him thanks for his services in the public orders of the regiment), General Sir William Meadows, and his Grace the Duke of Northumberland. For twenty years past however he has been detached from any particular corps, having been entrusted with offices of importance.

In 1779 he was appointed chief engineer on the unfortunate expedition against Fort St. Juan, on the Spanish Main; in which, although the British arms were successful, the greatest part of the besieging army perished from the unhealthy climate. Captain Polson who commanded, in his account of the capture of this fortress, published

published in the London Gazette of 18th July 1780, says, "There was scarcely a gun fired, but what was pointed by Captain Nelson of the Hinchinbroke, or Lieutenant Despard, chief engineer, who has exerted himself on every occasion."

Previous to this he had distinguished himself as an engineer in constructing public works in Jamaica, for which he afterwards received the thanks of the Council and Assembly of that island.

In consequence of these and other services, he was in 1781 appointed by General Dalling, then Governor of Jamaica, to be commandant and commander in chief of the island of Rattan* and its dependencies, and of the troops there, and to take rank as lieutenant-colonel and field engineer,

* Rattan is an island lying on the coast of the Spanish Main, where the logwood-cutters retreated when driven from Honduras.

and command as such on the Spanish Main, in Rattan, and throughout the dependencies of the government of Jamaica, on the Mosquito Shore, and Bay of Honduras.

His stay at Rattan was short. Finding upon his arrival, that island much in want of stores and necessaries for its defence, he returned to Jamaica in a small vessel, during the hurricane season, at the evident risk of his life, to procure the necessary succours. Of this service General Dalling expressed very strongly his approbation, in his dispatches to Lord George Germain. In the mean time however a report having gained ground, of an intended attack by the combined fleets of France and Spain against Jamaica, it was thought proper by the Governor to detain him in that island, to superintend the construction of works for its defence; in which service he was employed, until Lord Rodney's decisive victory of the 12th

12th April 1782, rendered the continuance of these operations unnecessary.

Having obtained leave of absence, Colonel Despard went in August 1782 to the Mosquito Shore, on his private affairs. On his arrival at Cape Gracias a Dios, he found his Majesty's service likely to be injured from the appointment of a Colonel Hodgson to the chief command. That officer was so obnoxious to the inhabitants, that they positively refused to serve under him. At the same time they presented an unanimous address to Colonel Despard, offering to put themselves under his command. To prevent this colony from being lost to the Crown, he accepted this command, and with a very inferior force retook from the Spaniards Black River, the principal settlement on the coast*. This important conquest procured him the most flattering, honourable, and strongly expressed testi-

* See the London Gazette of 30th November 1782.

monies of approbation, from the inhabitants of the Mosquito Shore, from the King of the Mosquitoes*, and all the Indian chiefs on the coast, from the Governor, Council, and Assembly of Jamaica, and from the King himself. His Majesty's high approbation is thus expressed in a letter

* KING GEORGE (for that is his name) attests this royal act simply by his *mark*. Although there be now no princes in Europe *se illiterate*, there was a time when monarchs of much superior consequence to his *Mosquito Majesty* did the like. The great *Charlemagne* could not write his name, as appears by an instrument ordering the Liturgy or Mass, as used at Rome, to be introduced into his churches, which is signed by his mark. And in *Anderson's Diplomata Scotiae*, as well as in *Dalrymple's Historical Collection*, there is a *fac simile* of a charter of King Duncan of Scotland, subscribed by his mark, "*Crux Duncani Regis*." This charter is also signed by eleven other persons, none of whom have the ill manners to reproach his Majesty for his ignorance of letters. The only difference of the subscriptions is, that the royal mark or cross is rather the largest of the twelve. It is almost unnecessary to say that the King of the Mosquitoes has no *Great Seal* to append to his royal documents.

The truth is, that this monarch must appear in a very contemptible light to persons accustomed to the splendour

ter from the Right Honourable Thomas Townsend (Lord Sydney) to the Governor of Jamaica, General Campbell, of 14th December 1782:

“ His Majesty has received the highest satisfaction at the account you have given of the success of his arms on the Mosquito Shore, under the conduct of Lieutenant-Colonel Despard, by the total defeat of the enemy, and effectually releasing his Majesty's subjects who resided in those settlements, from the distresses to which they have been lately exposed, and re-establishing them in the peaceable possession of their estates and property. I have his Majesty's commands to desire you will signify, in splendour of the courts of Europe. His Majesty wears no crown, no royal robes, creates no hereditary nobility, has no masters of horse, lord chamberlains, or lords of the bedchamber, no guards, and, what is still more, no exchequer. The only pre-eminence he has over his subjects is to lead them to the field of battle; and the only thing in which he resembles any of the princes of Europe is, that his principal amusement, or rather occupation, is the chase.

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the most honourable manner, his royal approbation of the judicious conduct and gallant services of Lieutenant-Colonel Despard, Major Lawrie, Captain Campbell, as well as to Commodore Parry, and the rest of the officers and crews of his Majesty's ships, who so heartily co-operated with them in the accomplishment of this desirable object."

The following are the honourable terms in which the Assembly of Jamaica express their sentiments on this occasion :

" House of Assembly, 18th December 1783.

" Resolved, That it be recommended to the House to send a Message to his Excellency the *Governor*, with a copy of this Resolution, requesting, that, in consideration of the eminent services rendered to this island in the years 1779 and 1782 by Captain Edward Marcus Despard, who voluntarily stood forth, and without the
least

least view of retribution of any kind, distinguished himself in the engineering line, by constructing various works for our defence; and also of his gallant and judicious conduct in 1782, when with a small, undisciplined, and inferior force he attacked and took the Spanish garrison at Black River, on the Mosquito Shore, made between seven and eight hundred of the enemy prisoners, and rescued hundreds of our fellow-subjects from captivity, and restored them to their possessions; his Excellency will be pleased to recommend the said Captain Despard to his Majesty for such army-rank, or other mark of his royal approbation, as he may be graciously pleased to confer on him."

And his Excellency the Governor of Jamaica, as a mark of his approbation, on the 19th November 1783, granted him the rank of Colonel of Provincials.

About

About this time there was an alarming misunderstanding between the Spanish and the British settlers on the Mosquito Shore, the particulars of which the writer of this narrative cannot exactly state ; but it was of so serious a nature as might have produced a fresh rupture between the two Crowns, but for the judicious explanations and interposition of Colonel Despard, on his arrival in England. Whether his having thus prevented an unnecessary war may have made him obnoxious to those who profit by war, those who profit by war will be best able to judge ; but to him it must give heart-felt satisfaction to reflect in his prison, that he probably hindered the destruction of thousands of his fellow-creatures, and the expenditure of millions of the nation's money.

In the remaining part of this narrative we shall see the subject of it in a civil capacity.

By

By the 6th article of the definitive treaty of peace with Spain of 1783, a Settlement was granted to England, on that part of the eastern coast of the peninsula of Yucatan, commonly, but improperly, called *The Bay of Honduras**, for the purpose of cutting logwood;—and by a subsequent convention between the two Crowns in 1786, an additional territory was ceded, in consideration of the British settlers evacuating the Mosquito Shore; and the farther privilege of cutting mahogany was for the first time granted by his Catholic Majesty.

In March 1784 Colonel Despard was appointed First Commissioner for settling and receiving the territory ceded to Great Britain by the 6th article of the treaty; which office he executed to the perfect satisfaction

* *Honduras*, properly so called, is a Spanish Province, about a hundred miles south-east of the British Settlement.

of all parties, particularly the British settlers, who being desirous of having a " Consul, Chief Judge, or Superintendent," appointed over them, applied to Governor Campbell by petition, wherein they state, that, " when settled in the island of Rattan, they experienced in Colonel Despard, their then Commandant, that thirst of knowledge, attention to their true interests, and mildness of government, which has, in a very particular manner, endeared him to all who were so fortunate as to be under his command; and from these considerations, they humbly conceive him to be of all men the fittest to preside over them." The same sentiments are still more strongly expressed in a memorial to the Right Hon. Charles James Fox, then one of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State.

On the 1st of December 1784, the wishes of these memorialists were gratified, and Colonel Despard, not so much from their
 1. appli-

application as from the special patronage of the King, was appointed “ Superintendent of his Majesty’s affairs, within the district which by the late treaty of peace has been allotted for the logwood-cutters, upon the coast of Honduras, and to prevent any quarrels or disagreements between his subjects that may be employed thereon, and those of his Catholic Majesty inhabiting that neighbourhood *.”

In the exercise of this office he so far fulfilled the great object of his appointment, that through his influence with the Spanish governors and officers in the province of Yucatan, he obtained from the Crown of Spain some very important privileges. By the Convention of 1786, the British settlers

* This appointment, however honourable, was far from being desirable, and the very reverse of lucrative. It obliged him to reside in a very inhospitable and expensive country, and to support the rank of a Representative of Majesty, upon a salary of 500*l.* a year, without any other emolument whatever.

were allowed to cut all sorts of wood, not excepting mahogany, as well as to enjoy every kind of fruit or produce of the earth, purely natural and without culture; but they were expressly prohibited from raising, by cultivation, the smallest article of produce. And so strictly did the Spanish Government interpret this article, that Don Juan Baptista Gual, one of their Commissaries appointed to visit the district in terms of the Convention, actually cut down such plantations of plantain-trees, and other esculent vegetables, as he saw in the course of his visit; and that not wantonly, or from malice (for he did it with the greatest reluctance, and passed by many plantations that he knew of, which not being in sight he did not consider himself obliged to take notice of *), but merely in conformity to the
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* The writer of this memoir accompanied Mr. Gual in his visit, in the capacity of British Commissary, and had many opportunities of witnessing the mildness
 with

Convention and his instructions. Colonel Despard, however, so far ingratiated himself with the Spanish commanders (particularly with Colonel, now General, Grimaest, the Spanish Commissioner for ascertaining and giving up the additional territory ceded by the Convention), that, through their application, he obtained from his Catholic Majesty a privilege to the British inhabitants to cultivate vegetables necessary for their families, and also the use of a key, or small island on the coast, for the residence of a pilot*.

In

with which that officer, who was one of the most amiable and accomplished young men he has ever seen in any country, executed his commission.

* To show this matter in its proper light, it will be necessary to quote some letters to Colonel Despard from Spanish officers upon the subject. Mr. Gual writes thus: " Sir—My gratitude will not suffer me to omit this opportunity of paying my respects to you, and acknowledging the obligations I am under for your particular politeness. This, however, is not my only motive for taking up the pen at present, it being now equally my wish and my duty to congratulate you on
having

In 1786, when the Mosquito Shore was evacuated by the British, in terms of the
 Conven-

having succeeded in your just desires in favour of those settlers, by the Grant of my Sovereign, allowing them to cultivate vegetables necessary for their subsistence; and I assure you, Sir, that from the sentiments of compassion, which the indispensable operations of my visit incited, I feel the greatest satisfaction that this concession is made, as being the only means of relieving them."

Major Breson, another Spanish officer, writes thus; "My dearest friend—The grace of the King my master, in having been pleased to permit the plantations in favour of those inhabitants for their support, as well as the establishment of a pilot, on English Key, exactly in the terms in which both articles were recommended by our good friend Colonel Grimarest, gives me the pleasure of congratulating you thereon, and of repeating my satisfaction for what is so interesting to me as being agreeable to you."

Lastly, General Grimarest, when on his journey to his Government of Sonora and Senaloa, writes thus from Mexico: "My dearest friend—What will you say to my silence? For these five months I have been from Campeachy, and travelling through different places, where I have only stopped to rest. The fatigue of my journey having brought on an indisposition, I have been detained since the 1st of November in this place, where I had the pleasure, twelve days ago, to receive the approbation of our mutual commission, the King being
 perfectly

Convention, most of the inhabitants of that colony went to reside at Honduras, where, in fact, they became the most numerous body of the people, they being in all (including slaves) near two thousand; while the former inhabitants of the Bay, of all descriptions, did not exceed seven hundred. The Superintendent received instructions from Government to do every thing in his power for the accommodation of these emigrants. In this, however, he found insurmountable difficulties. Not only was all the old district claimed by one or other of the Baymen; but even the additional territory ceded by the Convention, was every spot of it claimed as the property of some of them,

perfectly satisfied therewith. Several points not yet resolved on are under consideration—that respecting the establishment of a pilot, on English Key, has been approved of. I hope every thing will in like manner be granted, which can contribute to the comfort of the settlement, but more particularly to your satisfaction, having that as much at heart as if it were my own benefit, from the cordial friendship which unites us since our being together.”

and

and this even before it had been given up by Spain; for these gentlemen made no scruple to cut wood within the Spanish lines, and there are in their records several instances of causes determining the property of lands out of the British limits. These old settlers claimed immense tracts of country, and combined to prevent new settlers, either from the Mosquito Shore, or elsewhere, from having any benefit in the produce and trade of the district, which was thus monopolized by a very few individuals, styling themselves the principal inhabitants. This being the case, it will not be wondered at, if Colonel Despard's laudable attempts to accommodate the new settlers in the additional territory, drew upon him the enmity of these *principal inhabitants*. They, and one Mr. Robert White, calling himself the agent of the settlers, presented memorial after memorial to his Majesty's Ministers, containing the most false and frivolous charges against Colonel Despard; but Government

vernment being fully fatisfied with the propriety of his conduct, and seeing these complaints in their proper light, altogether disregarded them *.

When

* The sentiments of Government on this subject will best appear on a perusal of the following dispatch from his Majesty's Principal Secretary of State, Lord Sydney, to Colonel Despard, dated Whitehall, 26th June 1787:

" Sir, I received, on the 14th of last month, your letter of the 23d of February, enclosing a paper which had been presented to you, containing certain resolutions of the principal logwood and mahogany cutters residing within the Honduras settlement, respecting the disposal of the additional district granted by the late convention among his Majesty's subjects who have been obliged to evacuate the Mosquito Shore. I have laid your letter before the King, and I have received his Majesty's commands to acquaint you, that your proceedings hitherto meet with his Royal Approbation.

" His Majesty feels an equal concern for the interests of all his subjects, and is disposed at all times to listen to their reasonable applications; but in the present instance, his Majesty conceives that the Mosquito settlers, who have been obliged to relinquish their possessions, ought first to be attended to, especially in the disposal of those lands, which may in some degree be looked upon as a consideration for their settlements upon the Mosquito Shore. On this ground his Majesty

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has

When Lord Grenville came into office as one of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State, these memorialists renewed their attack, and knowing his Lordship to be ignorant of the state of Honduras, and its people, presented several memorials to him, filled with the most audacious lies, and charging Colonel Despard with the grossest injustice, tyranny, and oppression.—The same persons who had before solicited his appointment, on account of his abilities, knowledge, and attention to their interests, his mild, equitable, and conciliating deportment, and his steady and able discharge of his duty, had now the barefaced impudence to style him the “barbarous commanding officer of Honduras,” and to state him as guilty of all the enormities their fertile fancy could invent. It had, how-

has commanded me to instruct you, that the late inhabitants of the Mosquito Shore, who may arrive at the Honduras settlement, are to be accommodated with lands in preference to all other persons whatsoever.”

ever,

ever, the desired effect. Lord Grenville thought such charges demanded investigation, and in the mean time suspended Colonel Despard from his office, leaving it in his option either to remain at Honduras or return to England.

Colonel Despard chose the latter, and sailed for England in the end of May 1790. Before his departure, however, he received the most flattering testimonies of the grateful approbation of his conduct from all the magistrates (chosen by the people at large), and a vast majority of the inhabitants *. On his arrival, he did every thing in his power to promote the investigation of his conduct; but whether Ministers had then discovered that they had been misled, and did not choose to acknowledge it, or whatever else was the cause, all his efforts were in vain; and after

* This and several other Testimonials, which have been published in the Newspapers by Mrs. Despard, are omitted for the sake of brevity.

two years constant attendance upon all the departments of Government, he was at last told that there was no charge against him worthy of investigation—that his Majesty had thought proper to abolish the office of Superintendent at Honduras, otherwise he should have been reinstated in it.—But he was then, and on every occasion, assured that his services were not forgotten, and would receive their reward. It may be also proper to mention, that his attempts, for nearly these eight years, to get his Accounts with Government settled have been equally fruitless and unsuccessful, although he has claims to a large amount.

Such are the outlines of the public life of this great and good man. To this account little need be added. His character is thus truly described by the very persons who, afterwards, when they found his justice interfere with their private views and interests, became his greatest enemies and calum-

calumniators:—" In his character of Commander in Chief at Rattan, they had the experience of his abilities, knowledge, and attention to their interests, and of his mild, gentle, and attractive deportment in all his civil functions, as well as his vigorous, steady, and masterly discharge of his duty, in the time of danger and distress."—Respecting the nature of his Imprisonment, and treatment in the Prison of Cold Bath Fields, it would be improper here to enter into any detail or investigation. It is enough to say, that after having been kept in confinement for several weeks last spring, he was released, no charge being substantiated against him; but immediately after the Suspension of the *Habeas Corpus* act, he was again arrested, without any specific charge, and has now been kept a close prisoner for above eight months, in a House of Correction, without any attempt to bring him to trial.

THE END.

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* * The frontispieces to the four volumes are, General Washington, Dr. Franklin, William Penn, and Mr. Winterbotham, finely engraved by Granger.

